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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [UK](#)
SUBJECT: WALES: WHO WILL REPLACE FIRST MINISTER MORGAN WHEN HE RESIGNS?

Classified By: Classified by Political Minister Counselor Greg Berry for reasons 1.4 (b) AND (d).

¶1. (C) Speculation is rife in the Welsh media and among Welsh political insiders as to whom the Labor Party would "parachute in" to rescue the party in Wales and replace Welsh Assembly First Minister Rhodri Morgan, who has announced he will resign as First Minister in 2009, but retain his seat in the Assembly until 2011. PolOff spoke to Dr. Hywel Francis, Labor MP and Chair of the Welsh Affairs committee of the House of Commons on August 27th. He said several Assembly Members (AMs) are positioning themselves to succeed Morgan, but all are seen as flawed and many in the Welsh Labor party are still looking for a "white knight" who has the stature and vision to lead the Assembly as Labor prepares for the next election in 2011 in the face of weakening political support.

¶2. (C) According to Welsh media, the two leading candidates for the role of white knight appear to be former Secretary of State for Wales Peter Hain and European Parliament Member (MEP) Eluned Morgan. Both have strong name recognition and previous experience in government. Neither is an AM at present, however. In order for either to serve as First Minister, they would have to win a by-election. However, neither of the two most likely constituencies - one supposedly available due to the illness of the incumbent, and the other due to the incumbent's age - are considered safe seats, given Labor's recent electoral trouble in recent Parliamentary by-elections, and the small majorities the two incumbents enjoyed in the 2007 Assembly election. Both incumbents deny they would resign to make way for Mr. Hain or Ms. Morgan, but both might be made offers they couldn't refuse, such as peerages, according to Francis. Given this, some senior Labor officials in London are reportedly discounting either white knight candidate and are calling on Rhodri Morgan to stay in office until his AM term ends in 2011 and a "proper" successor can be found. This has not stopped many Labor activists in Wales from rapidly dividing into the "Peter" or "Eluned" camps.

Comment

¶3. (C) Ironically, this comes as the Labor leader's position becomes less attractive. Devolution is weak and troubled in Wales, the economy is the worst in the UK (England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland are all doing better) and both Plaid Cymru and the Tories are showing gains in Wales. No signal has come from either potential white knight candidate concerning their interest in succeeding Morgan. After 11 years of Labor with few economic gains to show and disenchantment with devolution, both opposition parties are polling stronger against Labor. The polling gains could see the current power-sharing arrangement with Plaid Cymru extended at the price of a Plaid First Minister.

LEBARON